

AND THE BEAT GOES ON

by Vicki Napier

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Summary: An "interesting" day in the life of Officer Dick Grayson

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 for the enjoyment of myself and the readers.

>
 I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful story "Nightshift" by Syl Francis, as I have made are several references to events and characters which appear in her writing. Also, the names of most of the officers are actual names of officers I have known over the years--in a non-law breaking way of course--and some of their experiences.

>
 I hope that some of the subject matter doesn't offend anybody and apologize in advance if it does. I just figured that after the last years worth of headlines and news stories about Bill & Monica, this isn't exactly news to anyone.

>

> "AND THE BEAT GOES ON"

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> *****

> "How about another round, barkeep," belched officer Pete Stoneless as he slid his empty beer mug down the bar toward the bartender, who caught it with ease and began to refill it from the tap. As his mug was slid back to him, without so much as a drop of foam spilling, he added, "how goes it at the academy? They treatin' you right, Dick?"

> "Not bad, but the atmosphere leaves a lot to be desired, and the cafeteria food is...well you know." Dick replied, grinning as he slapped two beers down in front of his newest patrons, patrolman Stan Dooley and his partner Sergeant Paul Gruebber. Dick was a police academy cadet during the week and a part-time bartender on the weekends at "Hogan's Alley." Mr. Hogan was a former police officer and his bar had always been a cop hang out. Dick had been working full time at Hogan's before he decided to go to the academy, so he

was familiar with most of the local beat cops. But since his first ride-along last week he now looked at each one a little differently. Instead of the big blob of corrupt cops he had seen before, he was now seeing them as individuals and most of them were actually pretty good guys.

> "I heard you had another ride along last night," Mr. Hogan remarked as he was hooking up a fresh keg to the dispenser. "Anything exciting happen?" he asked as if he didn't already know all the details. Dick's first time out had landed him a hero for saving a fellow officer, on report for ignoring a radio call, and a weekend of relentless ribbing from the cops here at the bar and the cadets at the academy.

> Dick's mind flashed back to last weekend's razz attack, knowing that it wasn't even going to compare to what he was about to get. This weeks subject matter was totally different and definitely less forgettable.

> *****

> "Hey, Dick, miss any radio calls? I hear there was a problem with the dispatch system," Stan remarked in a serious tone as he tried to keep a straight face, knowing that Dick had purposely ignored a call. "You'd think we could at least get decent equipment so's we could do a right proper job of protecting our fine taxpayers."

> "That's right, Stan," chimed in officer Randal Rufty from a table near the bar. "I say screw the paper clips and toilet paper, we need decent radio gear. It's inexcusable to send rookies out on the street with substandard equipment. The next thing ya know, they'll be issuing 'em water pistols and rubber hoses," he added slamming down his empty beer mug on the table in mock indignation.

> The bar was flooded by sunlight as a small group of cops entered, temporarily blinding all inside. After the door closed and his eyes readjusted, Dick recognized the new arrivals. Lieutenant Dave Paddington and his partner officer Maggie McClain, Officer Steve Kakooah (how he ended up in Bludhaven from Honolulu Dick couldn't imagine) and his partner officer Larry Highbrow. Also, Larry's girlfriend, Patricia Doright was with them. Patricia was the trauma cheif in the emergency room at Bludhaven General. Dick had heard that she and Larry started dating after she treated him for a wound he received in the line of duty--a shot in the ass, if he could believe the stories. Before they had reached the bar, he was already pulling beers for Dave, Maggie and Larry. Stan and Patricia always had whiskey and coke and he would get theirs as soon as the beers were up.

> "Hello, Dick. Sergeant Jennings asked us to drop this by for you," Larry said as he placed a black object on the counter. Sergeant Jennings had been the senior officer for Dick's ride along. Larry had talked Patricia into "borrowing" the toy from the ER daycare and a hospital security guard had recorded the fake dispatch call. As Larry set the toy CB radiotape player on the bar, he pushed the "play" button and a loud voice filled the bar. "_Officer Dick please respond, officer Dick, please respond. (brief pause) Officer Dick, where are you?" _ The bar erupted in laughter, but only the older officers caught the double meaning in reference to the old black-and-white police comedy show, "Car 54, Where Are You?" Dick grimaced ~I have got to get a new nickname.~

>

>
 Mr. Hogan knew he just opened the door for Dick to catch another round of hell, but Dick had a great sense of humor and would take it all in stride. Besides, it would just be a warm-up for what he would get from the other academy cadets come Monday, as last nights "action" far surpassed the prior weeks. His back to Dick, he

gave Stan a smile and a wink, who in turn grinned at Pete, Steve, Larry, Randal and Patricia. The games were about to begin.
>
 "Yeah, **_Officer Dick_**, heard you had some real excitement. Second time in a row now isn't it, **_Officer Dick_**. Rumor going around the academy is that **_Officer Dick_** must just be blessed. Most cadets don't get anywhere near as much excitement on ride alongs. Just boring old routine stuff. But not **_Officer Dick_**, **_oh no. **_Officer Dick_** gets good juicy 'shootings' and 'stabblings.'"

Dick blushed as the bar was filled with laughter. All the officers present already knew the details of his activities and Stan's particular punctuated emphasis on his name each time he spoke it only added fuel to the fire.

>
 Shaking his head, he dropped it into his hands as he leaned against the bar on his elbows, realizing that he had already been branded, **_Officer Dick_**, and trying to ditch the nickname now would be pointless. ~Why couldn't my parents have named me Sam or Mark. Hell, even Peter would've been better. That nickname is going to give them ammunition long after last night's events are forgotten.~ Pausing, he reconsidered his last thought. ~How could one unit end up with every nutcase call in town and why did it have to be mine? I might even begin to wish they would just remember the nickname and forget everything else. Yeah, I could only be so lucky.~

>
 "Sorry, Dick." Patricia interrupted his thoughts, apologizing for the cops around her. "My experience is that these guys never made it past puberty and shouldn't be allowed to carry guns, much less shoot off their mouths, or anything else for that matter." She gave Larry a sly grin, "Are you really sure you really want to join their little club?" she asked, as she shook her head and rolled her eyes.

>
 "Sure he knows what he gettin' into," Pete said as he put the money for his tab on the bar and headed for the door. "Where else could you possibly get such despicable treatment from people who know you carry a gun? Well, I'll see ya'll later. Gotta get home before I'm in the doghouse for life." Dick's gaze followed Pete as he exited the bar. ~Pete always seems to have a such a deflated attitude. I wonder if having the last name of "Stoneless" and working with this group might have something to do with it?~

>
 "That's right. **_Officer Dick_**, knows what he's getting into. Don't you, **_Officer Dick_**," Steve had picked up where Stan left off, not missing a beat, despite Pete's interruption.

>
 "Steve," Maggie scolded, "give the guy a break," and followed her words up with a smack to the back of his head. Turning to Dick, "Don't mind him, Dick, he's just suffering from the lack of an adequate sex life, coupled with an under-active neanderthal mental capacity. There's also been rumors that he has unresolved issues with his mother." Her gaze returned to Steve as she smuggly added, "Maybe she potty trained him too soon and his mind snapped."

>
 "Oh, and how would you know anything about my sex life anyway?" Steve retorted. "For all you know, I'm bangin' away all the time."

>
 "Yes, but when your significant other each and every time is 'Mr. Hand', then it's still considered inadequate." Maggie snapped back, dodging the pretzel bowl Steve threw in her direction.

>
 Dick picked up the bowl Maggie had thrown and tossed it in the sink to be washed with the empty beer mugs. ~Maybe they'll forget about me for awhile now that Steve seems to be the center of attention. He's a nice guy, but he reminds me of Roy Harper. Too much talent and too little maturity.~ Dick chastised himself again for wishful thinking.

>
 Dick realized that the subject had once again returned to him,

particularly a call that had ended with everyone involved at the ER, where Patricia was on duty. He heard Patricia questioning, "I just wanna know one thing. I mean seriously. What thought process was involved that would lead anyone to believe that a glass of cold water wouldn't have been more effective? I mean, is a botched blow-job really and excuse for someone to be stabbed in the head with a fork?" Being a physician sometimes made her analytical about things others didn't even want to think about, much less analyze.

>
 ~I can't believe she just seriously asked that~ Dick thought, he and all the other male cops staring bug-eyed at Patricia, Maggie snickering from behind her beer mug. Larry, who was used to her rather straight forward questions, took it upon himself to answer in a somewhat irritated, but informative tone. "It's a guy thing, OK. In a situation like that, ****_we_**** don't even have thought processes." His tone turned more adversarial as he continued, "And for the record, there's an amendment to the constitution that prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. Although it doesn't mention it specifically, ****_we_**** interpret that to include being subjected to any conversation in which the phrases '_botched blow job_' and '_stabbed in the head with a fork_' are used in the same sentence!"

>
 ~I would ask God to take me now, but I have a sinking feeling that he is in the mood for a good laugh. A good, ****_long_**** laugh. The only bright spot is, that with Gotham being cut off from civilization, this probably (hopefully??) wouldn't make it up the police grape vine and _they_ won't hear about it. Even though Bruce wouldn't ever actually say anything, it would be bad enough just knowing he knew. But Tim and Barbara would give me a harder time than any of these guys ever thought of.~ Dick thought ruefully. ~Mom and Dad always said to think like an optimist. Then they called me Dick. God help me.~ Less than optimistically, he began to wonder ~What's going to be the next topic of discussion?~ and his mind raced over the events of the previous evening so he could be prepared.

>

>
 Dick was once again assigned to Sergeant Jennings and Officer Kelp for his ride along. Even though his first outing had managed to land him on report, Jennings and Kelp had good words for his performance, off the record, of course. Not long after they had left the station and were beginning their regular patrol pattern, there was a loud bang and the car veered suddenly to the left. An inspection of the front tire found that the tire had been punctured by a gold-plated straight razor from a mens toiletry gift pack.

>
 "Something tells me this is the beginning of a _wonderful_ shift," Kelp remarked as he removed the spare from the trunk. "When they start out this way, you know there's just no hope."

>
 "Dick, see if you can get some water for this." Jennings ordered, as he handed Dick a rag that he found in the back floor board. "The last time Kelp had to change a tire, he got grease all over the car."

>
 The car had been stopped at the end of the parking lot of a Piggly Wiggly Supermarket so Dick sprinted over to the supermarket office and was given access to the washroom. As he was about to leave the store, one of the bag boys approached him with a concerned look on his face. 'Officer,' he said 'I think there's something wrong with that woman out there in the blue Ford Escort. She's been sitting there holdin' the back of her head for over an hour. And all the windows are up and the doors are locked and she won't unlock them but at the same time she looks like she needs help."

>
 "I'll check it out, and thanks for noticing." Dick told the bag boy. ~I know I'm just supposed to be observing, not actually doing anything, but this doesn't sound too serious, and it's on my

way.~ Dick thought, ignoring the little voice in the back of his mind that was warning him that this would probably get him in more trouble.

>
 As Dick approached the car, he saw that indeed the woman is sitting there holding the back of her head. He tried to get her to unlock the doors, but she frantically yelled she couldn't because she had been shot in the back of the head. Dick dropped the towel in shock and yelled for Jennings and Kelp. "This woman's been shot. Get an ambulance."

>
 Jennings got on the radio and Kelp start running for Dick's location. Dick used his flashlight, the only real police gear he is allowed to carry, to break out the back window. As Kelp arrived, Dick knew he had just made another mistake. "Tell Jennings to cancel the ambulance. There's no emergency here," he said and rolled his eyes in dismay and shame.

>
 "What do you mean?" the lady screamed. "I've been shot in the back of the head and if I move my hands my brain will fall out. Please help me, I can feel my brain and I know if I put my hands down it will fall out. Can't you see?!!"

>
 Dick had instantly assessed the situation and the woman blushed with embarrassment as Dick explained the situation to her. "Miss," he said, trying not to let too much sarcasm show in his voice, "you haven't been shot and your brains aren't falling out. It appears that the heat caused this canister of Pillsbury biscuits to explode, which," ~if you are really stupid, and it appears you are~ Dick thought himself, "might have sounded like a gunshot. The dough hit you in the back of the head, and that is what you are feeling that you think is your brain.' All the time officer Kelp stood beside Dick fighting with everything in him to keep from totally loosing it. They both told the woman to be careful, and she drove off just as Sergeant Jennings made it to the scene.

>
 "So what's the deal, Dick?" Jennings asked and Kelp burst into laughter and Dick stood there blushing and looking very sheepish. ~Why me. I wonder if Bruce was more upset about me becoming a cop than I thought and he's put some kind of voodoo curse on me?~ Dick thought absentmindedly. ~Naw, even he wouldn't be this cruel. But I have ducked out on a lot of dates with Clancy...maybe...no, she wouldn't, would she?~

>
 "Nothing, Jennings. It was nothing." Kelp answered for Dick, in between fits of laughter. "It was just some dumb blonde being...well...dumb. We'll fill you in over coffee. Yeah, coffee and biscuits, huh, Dick?" And continued his laughter as they returned to the car. After relating the events, Jennings had been sympathetic to Dick's impetuous mistake. Kelp, on the other hand, continued to make "biscuit" jokes at every opportunity.

>
 ~Maybe Kelp will get this out of his system before patrol ends.~ Dick thought optimistically, then reconsidered. ~Yeah, sure he will, **_Dick._**~

>
 Patrol continued on pretty much uneventfully through the early evening. Jennings and Kelp made points on procedure and protocol as they came up, and for the most part seemed eager to help Dick become as good a cop as possible. Last week Dick had begun to rethink his generic 'they're all crooked' view of the BHPD, and now he was really beginning to see things differently. ~Maybe the corruption here does start at the top, but it hasn't made it all the way down yet. Maybe this is where the change will have to come from after all. A revolution of sorts. Led by General Dick.~ He instantly rebuked himself for his mistake. ~Great, they've got **_me_** doing it now!~

>
 Around ten-thirty, they were called to handle a disturbance at

a local bar. This particular bar was also known as a hang out for prostitutes and their pimps. When they arrived at the scene, the club bouncers had a pimp and one of his "ladies" cornered on the sidewalk.

>
 Jennings turned to Dick as he and Kelp opened their doors. "Tag along, Grayson. Take notes and pay attention." As the three officers approached, Jennings added, with a wink at Kelp, "and, this time see if you can stay out of trouble."

>
 "Yes, sir," Dick responded promptly, silently thinking, ~Please God, if you have any mercy whatsoever, please let this go smoothly.~ Dick was startled because he could have sworn he heard a voice in his mind saying to him, "dream on, *_Officer Dick._**"

>
 His thoughts were interrupted by Kelp, who was explaining, "The pimp is 'Cletus Mac' and that's his lady 'Lady Bird'. Cletus likes to keep his ladies in line by smacking them around. Of course, Lady Bird there is usually totally plastered most of the time and probably doesn't know when she does anything, much less if she gets paid for it. That don't tend to set too well with Mr. Mac."

>
 Sure enough, that was the situation--Cletus was pissed and Lady Bird was wasted. Jennings and Kelp were taking Cletus aside to powwow with the bar owner about the damages, when Lady Bird decided she wasn't getting the proper attention. She jumped on Kelp from behind and, with her legs wrapped around his waist, proceeded to belt him over the head.

>
 "Grayson, get her off me!" Kelp, yelled. Dick grabbed Lady from behind and, without much effort, extracted her from her assault position. She was about to turn her assault on Dick and when she paused, smiling slyly, "Hey your new, ain't ya, honey. Oh, and not bad. No not bad at all. But you look horny. When's the last time you gots yourself any, sweet cheeks? You know its true what they says, 'use it or lose it', and in your case that would be a tragic loss." Dick, still stunned by the verbal seduction, wasn't able to stop her from attacking him with a passionate lip lock.

>
 Both Dick and Lady fell backwards, and ended up against the hood of the police cruiser. With both hands holding his face, Lady scored at least half a dozen points of tonsil hockey before Dick was able to wrestle out from under her and pin her arms behind her back. Of course, he committed a tactical error when he remained in front of her, as he had to have his arms around her to hold her arms. She leaned forward and began probing his ear with her tongue and rubbing against him.

>
 "Grayson, you need any help?", Kelp inquired rather smugly. He had "inadvertently" forgot to mention that Lady Bird had the hots for anything in a police uniform, especially when she was drunk.

>
 "No, I've got it under control," he responded, shoving Lady away from him. She smiled and laughed and then proceeded to pass out in his arms. He caught her before she hit the ground, but feeling it would be another tactical error to be holding her when she came to, he set her down in the passenger seat of the cruiser.

>
 Jennings and Kelp had finished with Cletus and the bar owner. Cletus paid him for the damages and so no charges were filed. Suddenly the PA system from the squad car echoed through the crowded streets. "Hellos to you X-Mart shoppers, tonights red light specials is hooters, honkers, gazonkas and melons. All shapes, all sizes. Buts remembers, yous plays yous pays." Dick had turned his back on Lady for only a second, when she slammed the door shut and started broadcasting the nightly specials. Up and down the blvd, that other "ladies" whistled and cat-called, cheering her on.

>
 Dick yanked the door open, and pulled her from the vehicle, but not before she was able to finish her impromptu announcements.

She had just managed to grab a couple of hand fulls of Dicks...cheeks when Jennings and Kelp, each taking an arm, escorted her back to Cletus. As they walked away, Dick heard her ask Kelp, "damn Kelp, when the rest of you boys in blue gonna get firm ass-ets like that?"

>
 ~Well, so much for smooth. In less than five minutes I managed to loose control of a suspect, get molested, and commit a procedural violation by letting unauthorized personnel use police radio equipment. God help me if this gets back to Bruce. He'd probably put me on restriction and send me to my room.~ Then Dick grinned as a new thought entered his mind. ~But the manor is gone...and so is my room. Optimistic. Yeah, Dick, optimistic. That's the ticket.~

>
 "You know something, Dick?" Jennings inquired. "If I didn't know better I'd swear that you were trying to break the record for the most ride along incidents for academy cadets. I can tell you know your stuff, but jeez man, did you screw some witch and piss her off or something, cause you couldn't get any more unlucky if you tried."

>
 "Tell me about it," Dick replied. Silently cursing himself for the boat load of errors he had made. ~Damn, you'd think that I'd never done anything like this before. If I told them I was Nightwing and had been doing this since I was nine, they would laugh themselves into a coma.~

>
 Jennings put his arm around Dick's shoulder and gave it a friendly squeeze. "Hey, don't take it so seriously. Yeah, I know you've made some minor errors, but I meant it when I said you know your stuff. I can tell a load of crap when I see it and you ain't it. Just relax and don't try so hard."

>
 "That's right, Dick." Kelp piped up. "There ain't none of us that didn't have one or two really wild experiences during our ride alongs. Besides, now Lady thinks all the rest of us are substandard. Said if you wanted to come down after patrol, she'd be more than happy to massage your....ego."

>
 "All right Kelp, give him a break or I'll have to start remembering some of your adventures in stupidity." Jennings warned, a playful glint showing in his eyes for just a second, and Dick couldn't help but wonder what Kelp could have done that would possible compare to this.

>
 Shortly before the end of patrol, their final call was received. They were ordered to check out a possible assault at Angelino's Italian Restaurant. Enroute, dispatch called and informed them to proceed directly to Bludhaven General, as the assault suspects/victims were being transported there for medical attention. They arrived just ahead of the ambulance and are greeted inside by Patricia Doright.

>
 "Long night, boys?" she asked. "Heard you called for an ambulance earlier and then canceled. Things must not be going too well."

>
 "Just a case of mistake identity. Nothing major." Jennings answered and gave Dick a reassuring grin. The kid was good and talented, he could tell that and he didn't want Dick to get too discouraged. There weren't that many good cops in Bludhaven and he didn't want one with as much potential as Dick obviously had to be run out because of a few bad calls.

>
 "The EMS team is transporting a young couple in their early to mid 20's who appear to have assaulted each other." Patricia continued. The EMS crew brought in the assault couple. A young lady, holding a linen napkin from the restaurant to her forehead, which had four small puncture wounds and had bleed profusely enough to leave her long blonde hair streaked with red. A young man, also holding a

blood stained napkin, only his is pressed to his groin area, and his face white as a sheet. Dr. Doright took the couple into the examining room, Jennings and Kelp following to check with both victims to see if either is going to file charges.

>
 "Grayson, take a statement from the EMS crew while we see if anybody here wants to file charges." Jennings ordered, wanting to give Dick's confidence a boost and not seeing how anything weird could happen. Right? Wrong!!

>
 The senior member of the crew tried desperately to keep a straight face, but his partner had to return to the ambulance. Through the window, Dick noticed that he was doubled over laughing. ~Oh, please God, not again.~

>
 "This is a prime example of why some things are better left in the bedroom," the EMS driver began. "It appears that the young couple were out for a romantic dinner. After they declined dessert from the waiter and were enjoying an after dinner drink, stud-muffin there tells the wonder blonde about the time his brother's girlfriend crawled under the table at a restaurant and gave him a blow-job for desert. Well, she's had about four glasses of wine during dinner and decides that she's gonna try it too. After she gets under the table and starts...you know...letting him have it, she goes into an epileptic seizure and starts...well...sort

of...chewing...and...jerking from side to side. The guy panicked and stabbed her in the head with a fork to get her to let go. Neither one of them said anything about filing charges, but that's you guy's problem. Have fun, and be careful of those horny dates. You just never know what they want to sink their teeth into." He smiled and returned to the ambulance and joined his partner in a good laugh.

>
 Jennings and Kelp returned and informed Dick that neither one of the couple wanted to file charges. Jennings asked Dick, "What did the EMS crew have to say. Those two kids were pretty tightlipped and were really anxious to get us out of there before getting patched up?"

>
 ~I give up!~ Dick screamed to himself. ~No, they couldn't spill the beans themselves, and why should they when good ole ****_Officer Dick_**** is available. Ready, willing and able to be humiliated with a single fork stab. I'm going to be listed as reporting officer in training and so I'm also going to be on the receiving end of...of...hell! God, I'm screwed!~ Dick simply handed his notepad to Jennings and turned to leave, saying, "I wonder if Patricia has anything in there for curses, hexes, spells or possible possessions. And if not, maybe something for this splitting head ache. Something like, maybe, a morphine drip."

>
 Jennings and Kelp stood there stunned for a moment and then proceeded to read Dick's report. After taking more than a few minutes to compose themselves, they too went out to the patrol car, where Dick was glumly sitting in the back seat waiting for the inevitable.

>
 "Grayson, what can I say? There's a country/western song that has a line in it that goes something like, ' sometimes your the windshield, sometimes your the bug,' and you seem to be stuck in 'bug' mode right now." Jennings said consolingly, "but it can't last forever. You've got to be the windshield at some point."

>
 "Yeah," Kelp added. "This streak can't last forever. Besides, we all know how closed mouthed those EMS guys are. This probably won't make past the report desk."

>
 He was lying and Dick knew it. ~EMS crews are closed mouthed and the Grand Canyon's just a little pot hole in the road to California. And as for the report desk, he might as well call Peter Jennings and have it broadcast on the national news."

>
 "Thanks, guys, but we all know I'm going to be living this one down for a long time." Then Dick let out a small grin and added, "But you know, I'll bet they didn't have canned biscuits for dinner. And both incidents involved blondes...so it was just inevitable that something screwy would happen. Right?" ~OK, I'm grasping here, but maybe they'll buy it.~

>
 Jennings and Kelp both let out a small laugh and Jennings replied, "Grayson, you're a good man. Anyone who could find a bright spot from your experiences today is going to make one great cop. You get too much hell let me know and I'll set 'em straight."

>
 They had just pulled into the academy parking lot and Kelp added, "Yeah, you can ride with us any time. Hopefully, we'll even see you next week." With a wink at Jennings and with a mischievous tone he added, "and ifn' you ever want to go a second round with Lady, just let me know. I'm sure we could track her down."

>
 Dick snorted and threw his an empty styrofoam coffee cup at Kelp as he exited the car. "It's been nice working with you, too. Maybe I'll ask Jennings out for lunch one day and have him explain that comment he made earlier about your past experiences." Dick leaned down to look in Kelps window, and slyly added, "for training purposes, of course. Hope to see you guys next week. Be careful."

>

>
 "Now, Dick," Steve said in a rather paternal sounding voice that made Dick want to crawl under the bar, "I think that it is the duty and obligation of us older and wiser officers to guide you and steer you away from hazards that you may encounter. We all here, Larry, Pete, Randal, and I, have ascertained that you are about the same age as that 'frisky' couple from the restaurant and we feel that we should be here to answer any questions you might have about any why's and wherefore's and such. We certainly wouldn't want *_Officer Dick_* to end up with scars he wouldn't want to have to explain to the future *_Mrs. Officer Dick_*, if you know what I mean."

>
 "Oh, please, he's probably had better sex than any of you ever even thought about," Maggie said more matter of factly than she intended. "And more of it too." She turned to Steve and added, "And without the benefit of 'Mr. Hand' either."

>
 Randal inadvertently saved Dick from further embarrassment by announcing, "Hey, the games starting."

>
 All the patrons at the bar turned there attention to television at the end of the bar and for the moment, forgot about Dick. As Dick washed up the empty mugs, a thought crossed his mind, triggered by what Maggie had said. ~If they only knew. They haven't got a clue how good it can be with an alien princess flying through the air at 300 feet.~ A big biscuit-eatin' grin formed on his lips as he remembered that and other places that he and Kory had found to be intimate, including a certain out-of-the way restaurant in upstate New York.

>
 "Grayson, I'm glad you can maintain a sense of humor around these guys." Mr. Hogan remarked. "What's the big smile for?"

>
 "Oh, nothing really, Mr. Hogan. Just being _optimistic_.

>

> THE END

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